

3/8/22 Tuesday

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Video: Florida Students Stage Massive Walk-Out Protest Over 'Don't Say Gay' Bill

On Monday, media giant Disney defended its decision not to take a stance on Florida's so-called "Don't Say Gay" bill, claiming it would turn the company into a "political football." However, critics noted Disney had denounced other anti-LGBTQ measures and had donated funds to every sponsor and co-sponsor of the Florida bill.

Hundreds of students at a Florida high school staged a walk-out protest against a controversial bill hours before it was approved by the state's legislature. The measure would ban discussion of all LGBTQ topics in schools.

At 9 am Tuesday morning, more than 500 students at Winter Park High School in Florida's Orange County protested in defense of LGBTQ rights, walking out of the classrooms and rallying on a plaza outside the school building.

The students held signs and chanted slogans such as "We say gay!" and "protect trans kids." "We wanted to show our government that this isn't going to stop," Will Larkins, a junior at Winter Park who helped organize the protest, [told CNN](#). "There were walkouts all last week. This is going to continue. If this passes, there will be protests everywhere. We wanted to get the attention of our representatives, our senators, because the point is to show them that we are the ones in power. The people are the ones in power, and what they're doing doesn't represent us, especially marginalized groups."

Across the Sunshine State, students have [staged walkout protests](#), as well as chanted slogans in the halls in recent days.

Formally known as House Bill 1557 or the "Parental Rights in Education" bill, it is better known as the "[Don't Say Gay](#)" bill because it would ban discussions of gender identity and sexuality in classrooms. This would reportedly stop LGBTQ teachers from discussing their identities or mentioning their same-gender spouses, and the children of LGBTQ parents from mentioning their parents in school.

The bill has aroused widespread condemnation, including by US Secretary of Transportation [Pete Buttigieg](#), a gay man and the nation's highest ranking LGBTQ person.

Republican State Senator Dennis Baxley, one of the bill's sponsors, [said it aimed to address](#) "social engineering" in the classroom, claiming that it would lead to more students coming out as transgender if they were to learn about the existence of trans people.

"Do we really think that teachers are engineering students to become gay?" Democratic State Sen. Tina Polsky asked in a floor discussion on Monday. "It's preposterous."

The [bill passed on Tuesday](#) by a vote of 22-17, and now heads to Governor Ron DeSantis' desk. The Republican leader has [explicitly endorsed](#) the bill, characterizing it a banning "sexual instruction" and "a focus on transgenderism." DeSantis' administration has also implemented other measures against LGBTQ rights recently, including a ban on trans girls competing in girls' sports

His spokesperson, Christina Pushaw, went even further, calling it [an “anti-grooming bill”](#) and claiming that opponents of the bill were “probably a groomer,” a term that refers to how pedophiles lure children into trusting them so they can take sexual advantage of the child. That posturing evokes the 1970s [“Save Our Children” campaign](#) spearheaded by pop singer Anita Bryant. The movement, which started in Florida’s Dade County before spreading to several other states, aimed to revoke laws protecting LGBTQ people from discrimination. The movement’s momentum was finally blunted after gay San Francisco City Councilor Harvey Milk [organized an effective effort](#) to convince Californians to vote down a referendum banning LGBTQ teachers from California schools.

The Florida bill is [one of more than 160](#) potentially infringing on LGBTQ rights in US state legislatures this year, according to the LGBTQ rights group [Human Rights Campaign](#). These bills span a wide variety of topics, from banning trans girls from competing in girls’ sports teams to banning trans women from using women’s restrooms.

In Texas, Governor [Greg Abbott decreed last month](#) that gender-affirming health care or behavior for transgender children would be considered “child abuse,” directing the state’s Department of Family and Protective Services to investigate reported and suspected cases. The rule could see children taken from their parents and taught going through puberty as the gender they were assigned at birth, [which has been identified](#) by health professionals as destructive of their mental health.

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CIA Director Burns Says ‘Chinese Calculus’ on Taiwan Altered But Warns Not to ‘Underestimate’ Xi

Several US analysts and commentators, including former US President Donald Trump, have claimed that China could potentially invade Taiwan while Russia’s special operation in Ukraine is still ongoing. However, so far there’s been no military buildup or indication that preparations are being made for an attack.

Speaking before the House Intelligence Committee on Tuesday, CIA Director William Burns warned that Beijing was drawing lessons from Russia’s special operation in Ukraine and would be applying them to its plans for Taiwan.

The CIA chief said he felt there was little room for a more “productive” conversation with China over Taiwan, an autonomous island that Beijing claims as a part of China.

"I would just say analytically, I would not underestimate President Xi and the Chinese leadership's determination with regard to Taiwan," [Burns told federal lawmakers](#) at a hearing on worldwide threats.

"I do think that they have been surprised and unsettled to some extent by what they've seen in Ukraine over the last 12 days, everything from the strength of the Western reaction to the way in which Ukrainians have fiercely resisted," Burns noted.

He added that he believed there had been "an impact on the Chinese calculus with regard to Taiwan, and which we obviously are going to continue to pay careful attention to."

US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines also told the hearing that "It does seem as if they [China] are potentially paying a price for not criticizing Russia, and that may have an impact on how this trajectory moves forward."

However, Defense Intelligence Agency Director Scott Berrier cautioned that Taiwan and Ukraine are "two different things completely."

The government in Taipei calls itself the Republic of China, the last remaining outpost of the government that ruled all of China between 1912 and 1949, when the socialist revolution established the People's Republic of China on the mainland. Both governments claim to be the sole legitimate ruler of a single united China, and Beijing regards US relations with Taiwan as meddling in Chinese internal affairs.

Beijing has remained committed to reunification with Taiwan, but made no threats of attack; however, it has warned that [US support for the island's](#) pro-independence factions could drive them toward declaring formal independence, which would mean war. Beijing has laid out a "one country, two systems" plan for Taiwan if it were to return to Chinese rule, akin to the relationship with Hong Kong after that island was returned to China after 150 years of British colonial rule. Regular Chinese military drills and transits near Taiwan are often reported as challenges or threats to Taiwanese sovereignty, especially in the Western press, even when they involve a handful of aircraft flying hundreds of miles from the island. However, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has also dramatically expanded its amphibious capabilities in recent years, which Western analysts say poses a threat to Taiwan.

Since Russia [launched its special operation](#) aimed at neutralizing and de-Nazifying Ukraine on February 24, China watchers have fretted about Beijing's potential connection to the operation, including that it could launch its own parallel effort in Taiwan.

"I haven't seen anything so far, but that doesn't mean they haven't talked about it internally and doesn't mean that they won't try something," US Air Force Gen. Kenneth Wilsbach, the head of US Pacific Air Forces, [told the Air Force Association](#) last week. He said his surveillance assets were watching Chinese President Xi Jinping "like a hawk."

[Trump has also claimed](#) that "China is gonna be next" after Russia, using Russia's operation as a bludgeon against his political rival, US President Joe Biden, by claiming that Russian President Vladimir "Putin would have never done it, and Xi would have never done it" if he had won the November 2020 election.

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GOP Introduces 'No Oil From Terrorists Act' to Ban Buying Iranian Oil as JCPOA Revival Nears

A group of Republican congress members has introduced a new bill that would ban the US from buying oil from Iran, which could otherwise resume after a yearslong gap caused by Washington's unilateral withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018.

"The Biden administration is now considering buying oil from Iran, the world's largest state sponsor of terror. There is absolutely no reason to import terrorist's oil when we can drill better,

cheaper, and cleaner right here at home,” Rep. Jim Banks (R-IN), chairman of the Republican Study Committee, [said on Tuesday](#).

Banks said that US President Joe Biden “crushed the American energy industry on day one of his presidency,” forcing the US to become “dependent on our foreign adversaries for oil.” He was likely referring to [Biden’s executive order](#) on his first day in office that banned oil drilling on federal lands and protected areas, as had been controversially allowed by the prior Trump administration. Banks said this caused a spike in oil prices, which he credited for enabling Russian President Vladimir Putin to launch a special military operation in Ukraine.

On Tuesday, Biden also announced he was [banning the importing](#) of Russian petroleum products as part of the latest round of sanctions in retaliation for the Ukraine operation, which aims to destroy the neo-Nazi forces in Ukraine [the US has enabled](#) for years.

However, those sanctions could impede Biden’s effort to revive the JCPOA, which after nearly a year of talks in Vienna, Austria, seems to be [on the cusp of success](#). The 2015 deal, signed with seven powers, including the US and Russia, placed strict limitations on the quality and quantity of uranium Iran could refine in exchange for the removal of international sanctions against Iran’s economy. However, the US pulled out in 2018 and reimposed the sanctions, claiming without evidence that Iran was secretly pursuing a nuclear bomb.

Speaking to Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian on Monday, Russian Foreign Minister [Sergey Lavrov said](#) it was essential that the new JCPOA “provide for all participants to have equal rights in relation to the unhindered development of cooperation in all areas without any discrimination.” The statement has been widely interpreted as meaning that Iran should be exempt from the US sanctions against Moscow, a key economic partner of Iran and a [major player in Iran’s](#) civil nuclear program.

The sanctions are threatening to [hurt the US economy](#), too: the price of crude oil in international markets has spiked sharply over the past two weeks, and domestic gasoline prices have hit their highest point in 15 years. With the US already facing its worst inflation in 40 years thanks to higher shipping costs created by the COVID-19 pandemic, investors are expecting the situation to become even worse.

Jim Paulsen, chief investment strategist for the Leuthold Group, [told CNBC on Monday](#) that “‘stagflation’ is rapidly becoming the central focus in portfolio strategies,” referring to the 1970s phenomenon caused by Middle Eastern oil exporters imposing an embargo on Western nations who supported Israel in the 1973 war.

“Preparing for slower growth and more persistent inflation is driving investor fears and actions,” the analyst added.

At home, Biden is facing increasing criticism of high gas prices and his administration’s stance [against the expansion](#) of fossil fuel extraction, which is part of a larger effort to curb the worst effects of [human-induced climate change](#). In the Tuesday address where he announced a ban on Russian oil imports, [Biden called the cost](#) increases “Putin’s price hike.”

“It’s simply not true that my administration or policies are holding back domestic energy production,” Biden said. “That’s simply not true. Even amid the pandemic, companies in the United States pumped more oil during my first year in office than they did during my predecessor’s first year. We’re approaching record levels of oil and gas production in the United States.”

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Scientists Warn Giant Japanese Orb Weaver Spider Could Become Endemic to North America
By - Morgan Artyukhina

Naturalists in the American Northwest have labored in recent years to stop a deadly species of Asian hornet, nicknamed the “murder hornet” for its killing sprees through honeybee hives, from permanently establishing itself in North America. Now another invasive species on the opposite end of the country is making itself at home.

A new study has found that the Joro spider might have the physical attributes necessary to survive in colder North American climates than just the warmer southeastern areas where it’s been spotted in recent years.

Scientists at the University of Georgia reported in [a recent study, published](#) in the journal Physiological Entomology, that the Joro spider’s high metabolism, heart rate, and tolerance of cold mean it is capable of breaking out of a relatively small area of northern Georgia and western South Carolina where it has existed since 2013.

The yellow, black and red spider is native to East Asia, but it could now become endemic to North America. However, while the spiders spin large webs and are of an intimidating size - an adult female can be 3 inches long from toe to toe - their bite is painful but not medically significant. Additionally, their impact on the environment seems to be small.

“People should try to learn to live with them,” Andy Davis, corresponding author of the study and a research scientist in the Odum School of Ecology, said in a [UGA press release](#). “If they’re literally in your way, I can see taking a web down and moving them to the side, but they’re just going to be back next year.”

The Joro spider spins massive, intricate webs to catch its insectoid prey, and it also uses its silk to create a “parachute” that can carry it a significant distance on the wind. However, it likely arrived in North America in a shipping container and not by riding the thermals across the ocean.

Another species of invasive bug from East Asia, the Asian Giant Hornet, aroused fear due to its deadly sting, and authorities on the West Coast have [worked for two years](#) to try and stop the hornet from establishing a permanent presence on the continent. The massive insects can kill an adult human with their sting, and are infamous for slaughtering their way through the hives of honeybees, giving them the unsettling but not-entirely-inappropriate nickname of “murder hornet.”

Benjamin Frick, a co-author of the study and an undergraduate researcher in the School of Ecology, cautioned that when it comes to the Joro spider, “there’s no point in excess cruelty where it’s not needed.”

“You have people with saltwater guns shooting them out of the trees and things like that, and that’s really just unnecessary,” he explained. “There’s really no reason to go around actively squishing them. Humans are at the root of their invasion. Don’t blame the Joro spider.”

In fact, they could prove to be a benefit. The large insects will be a plentiful food source for birds or other animals, and they [seem to have an appetite](#) for the brown marmorated stink bug, another invasive species of insect that native spiders don't like to eat.

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Canada Sending Additional C\$50Mln Worth of Defense Aid to Ukraine – Trudeau

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) – Canada is sending an additional 50 million Canadian dollars (\$39 million) worth of defense aid to Ukraine, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Wednesday.

"Today I can announce an additional 50 million dollars worth of equipment that we will be sending towards Ukraine to help out," Trudeau said at a joint press conference with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

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US Oil Import Ban to Cause Russia to Shift Toward Asian, Non-Western Markets - Investor

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States' move to ban Russian oil will likely prompt Moscow to make a more aggressive shift towards Asia and other non-Western markets, Sovereign Wealth Management CEO Gary Korolev told Sputnik.

Earlier on Tuesday, US President Joe Biden announced the United States would ban Russian oil imports.

"While this embargo does create problems, Russia still has other places where it can sell its oil, including Asia and Europe depending on how harsh or soft Europe sanction regime will be," Korolev said. "These sanctions are likely to cause Russia to make an even more aggressive shift towards Asia and non-Western aligned markets."

Korolev added that while consequences for the Russian economy are going to be negative in the short and mid term, only 8% of Russian oil exports per day come to the United states. Meanwhile, US gasoline prices reached an all-time high record of \$4.17 per gallon on Tuesday, the American Automobile Association (AAA) said. This is the highest recorded national average price, the AAA added. On Monday, the average price for regular gas was \$4.065 per gallon, while a week ago it was \$3.619, the AAA added.

When asked what impact will the ban have on gas prices in US and On US economy, Korolev said, "historically, when there is a large and sustained spike in gasoline prices it leads to a recession."

"Many can remember \$140 per barrel gasoline price right before the great financial crisis. This again happens because consumers have to spend that much more on gas and do not have as much left over for other goods and services," said. "One long term positive aspect for the US

economy maybe the government will be more willing to spend on hydrocarbon infrastructure to reduce, or eliminate reliance on oil imports. This may mean growth in a shale, and offshore oil sectors. It may also mean increased potential for new pipelines being built

Korolev said higher gas prices mean lower profit margins for businesses and customers have less money to spend due to shelling out more for gas.

"It also means higher input costs into products and services due to higher logistics costs. All this means lower profitability for the end business," he explained.

With regards to the ban's effect on the global market and the oil prices, Korolev believes that this decision will only serve to keep oil prices elevated, while likely contributing to a discount for Russian oil.

"The discount is due to the fact that many traders and importers may be afraid to purchase Russian oil even if they are not directly barred from doing so," he said. "Due to potential 'public shaming' - that's what happened to shell recently when it bought Russian oil at a \$28 discount. We cannot say how much of a price increase will be sustained and for how long, but the length and severity of the Ukraine conflict will have a huge impact on it."

The United States and its allies have imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia in response to its special military operation in Ukraine. The sanctions have slowed but not entirely eliminated the ability of Russian exporters of oil and gas to transact deals that require world financial networks and especially dollars.

Russia provides 10% of the world's crude oil needs and 40% of Europe's gas requirements. The United States, however, buys a limited amount of Russian oil, taking just 20% of the 10.5 million barrels per day exported by Russia in 2021.

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Turkey Hopes Lavrov-Kuleba Meeting Will Bring Peace-Talk Progress - Top Energy Official

HOUSTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Turkey hopes that progress in peace talks will be made during upcoming negotiations between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba in Antalya, Turkish Deputy Energy and Natural Resources Minister Alparslan Bayraktar told Sputnik.

"Foreign Minister Lavrov and Foreign Minister Kuleba will meet in Antalya. I will also be there. I hope there will be some progress in their peace negotiations," Bayraktar said during an interview on the sidelines of the Cambridge Energy Research Associates (CERA) Week conference.

The meeting, which will happen on the sidelines of the Diplomacy Forum, is scheduled for March 10.

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Russia Will Remain Reliable Gas Supplier for Turkey - Top Energy Official

HOUSTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Russia has been a reliable supplier of gas for over three and a half decades and will remain so, Turkish Deputy Energy and Natural Resources Minister Alparslan Bayraktar told Sputnik.

"Also gas is quite important for us, because 45% of Turkey's gas needs come from Russia. As I already said, Russia has been a reliable gas supplier for over 3 and half decades, and we will continue in that way," Bayraktar said at the Cambridge Energy Research Associates (CERA) Week conference.

The official added that the recent decision by the United States to ban Russian oil, natural gas and coal imports will have a negative impact on the global market, especially Turkey.

"These sanctions will also have some spillover effect over other countries and regions. What we need is a stable market. We need our economies to grow. I don't think this will help to this issue in any way," he said.

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US Ban on Russian Oil Will Have 'Terrible Impact' on Market - Top Turkish Energy Official

HOUSTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States' decision to implement sanctions on Russia's energy sector will have a terrible impact on the global market, Turkish Deputy Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Alparslan Bayraktar told Sputnik.

"Terribly," Bayraktar said on the sidelines of the Cambridge Energy Research Associates (CERA) Week conference when asked how he thinks the sanctions against Russia will affect the global oil market.

To replace Russian oil in the global market would be very difficult, given their status as a top producer, Bayraktar added.

"So, the world needs to increase the capacity, otherwise it will be very difficult. To replace Russian oil in the global market is very difficult," he said.

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US Indicts Aghorn, Executive in Connection With Texas Oil Field Deaths - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - A federal grand jury in Midland, Texas, has indicted an executive of Aghorn Operating Inc. and the company on with worker safety and environmental crimes in connection with two oilfield deaths, the US Justice Department in press release said. "Aghorn Operating Inc. ... and Trent Day, vice president of Aghorn, were indicted for violating the Clean Air Act relating to releases of hydrogen sulfide from an Aghorn facility, as well as obstructing an Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) investigation," the

release said on Tuesday. "Aghorn was also charged with three worker safety OSHA crimes for causing the death of an Aghorn employee.

The government decided to press charges after conducting an investigation into the October 26, 2019, deaths of Aghorn employee Jacob Dean and his wife Natalee Dean who succumbed to the poisonous gas hydrogen sulfide at an Aghorn facility in city of Odessa, the release said. Another corporation, Kodiak Roustabout Inc., was charged with violating the Safe Drinking Water Act and making false statements about the mechanical integrity of Aghorn injection wells in pressure charts and forms filed with the State of Texas Railroad Commission, the release added.

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US Rejects Polish Plan to Give Mig-29 Fighter Jets to Ukraine - Pentagon

(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-5)

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has rejected a proposal from the Poland government to allow transfer old MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine, US Defense Department Press Secretary John Kirby said in a statement.

"The prospect of fighter jets at the disposal of the Government of the United States of America departing from a US/NATO base in Germany to fly into airspace that is contested with Russia over Ukraine raises serious concerns for the entire NATO alliance," Kirby said on Tuesday. "It is simply not clear to us that there is a substantive rationale for it. We will continue to consult with Poland and our other NATO allies about this issue and the difficult logistical challenges it presents, but we do not believe Poland's proposal is a tenable one."

Kirby said the decision about whether to transfer the Soviet-built Polish-owned jets to Ukraine was ultimately one for the Polish government to make.

"We will continue consulting with our Allies and partners about our ongoing security assistance to Ukraine, because, in fact, Poland's proposal shows just some of the complexities this issue presents," Kirby added.

On Friday, the Russian authorities said the intelligence agencies of the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and several other NATO member states have been using Poland as a logistical hub for sending weapons and mercenaries to Ukraine.

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US Rejects Polish Plan for Giving Mig-29 Fighter Jets to Ukraine - Pentagon

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"The prospect of fighter jets at the disposal of the Government of the United States of America departing from a US/NATO base in Germany to fly into airspace that is contested with Russia over Ukraine raises serious concerns for the entire NATO alliance," Kirby said on Tuesday. "It is simply not clear to us that there is a substantive rationale for it. We will continue to consult with Poland and our other NATO allies about this issue and the difficult logistical challenges it presents, but we do not believe Poland's proposal is a tenable one."

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US State of Minnesota Teachers Strike After Talks Fail - Union Leader

Washington, March 8 (Sputnik) - More than 3,000 teachers and support professionals went on strike today after teachers union reps were unable to strike a deal following weeks of contract negotiations, a union leader said at a presser.

"We have continued to do so much more with so much less," said Greta Callahan, president of the Minnesota Federation of Teachers during a press conference on Tuesday. "Those at the top of this district continue to hoard power – continue to do so much less with so much more. And if we don't intervene, we believe that the Minneapolis Public Schools will cease to exist. We are in the fight for strong public schools for our city, for our students."

Classes for 30,000 students are suspended indefinitely in one of the state's largest school districts.

At dispute was the size of classes, securing a living wage for education support staff and additional mental health services and support for students who had to grapple with the coronavirus pandemic over the past two years.

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Blinken, Macron Discuss Ukraine Aid, Coordinating on Iran Nuclear Deal - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris where they discussed a coordinated and forceful response to Russia's intervention in Ukraine, as well as promising to continue coordinating closely on a prospective Iran nuclear deal, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said. "Secretary Blinken and President Macron agreed on the need for continued strong US-France cooperation in the face of the Russian government's unprovoked war against Ukraine," Price said on Tuesday.

The two officials also discussed ongoing efforts to provide assistance for the government and people of Ukraine and reaffirmed their commitment to impose "significant costs on President Putin and his associates for as long as they continue their war of choice in Ukraine," Price said.

Macron and Blinken "compared notes" on the diplomatic effort reduce the violence in Ukraine and coax Russia to end the military intervention, Price also said.

The two also agreed to continue coordinating closely as Iran, the US and a number of other countries try to hammer out a nuclear deal in Vienna that would bring Iran back into full compliance with the nuclear agreement, Price added.

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Canada Tightens Rules for Potential Russian Investors - Statement

TORONTO, March 8 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government announced that it is strengthening foreign-investment rules for potential Russian investors in response the Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

The Canadian government will henceforth only approve proposed Russian investments in exceptional cases, where the acquisition is deemed to be of benefit to Canada, and all bids involving individuals with suspected ties to the Russian state will trigger a national security review.

"For the purposes of reviewing such investments by direct or indirect Russian investors, under this policy the Minister of Industry... will find the acquisition of control of a Canadian business to be of net benefit to Canada on an exceptional basis only," an Investment Canada Act notice said on Tuesday.

Ottawa is cautioning Canadian businesses and non-Canadian investors to review their plans and "identify" potential connections to Russian investors and entities.

The policy will be in effect until further notice, according to the notice.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics requested help to defend themselves from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation was targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and emphasized that the civilian population is not in danger.

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Trump Says 'Confirmed' Most of Europe Will Not Ban Russian Oil, Natural Gas

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said he confirmed that most European countries will not ban Russian oil and natural gas after the Biden administration announced its decision to do so.

"Just confirmed that most of Europe won't go along with the United States in boycotting Russian oil and gas," Trump said in a statement on Tuesday.

Trump pointed out that the United States will be left out alone, being taken advantage of by Europe, as it defends those countries.

A senior Biden administration official told reporters the US ban on Russian oil and natural gas goes into effect immediately but buyers will have 45 days to wind down existing contracts. Russia provides 10% of the world's crude oil needs and 40% of Europe's gas requirements. The United States, however, buys a limited amount of Russian oil, taking just 20% of the 10.5 million barrels per day exported by Russia in 2021.

The United States and its allies have imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia in response to its special military operation in Ukraine.

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US Consumers Concerned by High Gas Prices After Biden Bans Russian Oil Imports

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - American car owners expressed their concern to Sputnik about rising gasoline prices as a result of a ban on the import of petroleum products and natural gas from Russia.

Earlier on Tuesday, US President Joe Biden announced the United States would ban Russian oil imports while the gasoline prices reached an all-time high of \$4.17 per gallon.

The opinions and views of Americans are divided. Some of them believe the imposition of sanctions against Russia in connection with the conflict in Ukraine is the right thing to do and are ready to pay more at gas stations.

At the same time, there are those Americans who categorically disagree with such a decision, which they consider to be fundamentally wrong.

"I definitely do not support the decision [to ban Russian oil imports]. This is completely biased. And something like this should be handled differently. The gas prices are outrageous," a resident of Queens in New York City, Anthony, told Sputnik while tanking up at one of the Lukoil gas stations. "I definitely don't agree with what he [US President Joe Biden] is doing, what is going on."

Lukoil gas station manager Tarik said that he had to add 10 cents to the price of gasoline overnight alone and noted that there will be another price increase in the evening to \$4.29 for Regular, \$4.59 for Plus, and \$4.7 for Premium gasoline.

Tarik has no doubts the Biden's move on Russian oil and natural gas will result in bigger gas bills for American families with US drivers as well as in an outflow of customers.

Over the past day, 25% fewer customers came to Lukoil gas stations even though the location offers one of the lowest prices in the area.

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US Stocks Slide 4th Day in a Row as Biden Bans Russian Oil, Energy Imports

NEW YORK, March 8 (Sputnik) - US stocks fell for a fourth straight day on Tuesday after President Joe Biden's ban of Russian oil and energy imports and investors grew more concerned about the global economy.

"Trading US stocks has become massively complicated as the impact from the war in Ukraine continues to drive persistent volatility with commodity prices, which is wreaking havoc on inflation expectations and driving recession fears," Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said.

Wall Street's three major stock indexes - the Dow Jones Industrial Average index, the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq Composite - closed Tuesday's trading down between 0.3% and 0.6%. All three indexes are down double-digits for the year.

Earlier on Tuesday, Biden said Russian oil, gas and other energy products will no longer be accepted at US ports. He acknowledged that the United States' European allies might not yet be in a position to join Washington on this as Europe gets 40% of its gas from Russia.

But while the United States imports about only about 3% of its oil from Russia, the widening conflict with Moscow and its impact on US prices were hurting ordinary Americans, economists warned.

At US pumps on Tuesday, the retail price of automobile fuel gasoline was at \$4 or more a gallon, the highest since 2008. The reading for February's US Consumer Price Index, due on Thursday, is expected to show a year-on-year growth of nearly 8% - the highest in 40 years. Such concerns were what led to Wall Street's lower finish for a fourth straight day.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, made up mostly of industrial stocks, closed down 0.6%. The Dow has lost about 10% since the year began.

The S&P 500, which groups the top 500 US stocks, settled down 0.7%. For the year, it was down about 13%.

The Nasdaq Composite, made of highly-valued tech stocks such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Nasdaq and Google, finished down 0.3%. It has lost almost 18 % so far for 2022.

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US Gave Ukraine Large Number of Anti-Battery Radars, Looking at Other Options - Nuland

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States provided a large number of counter-battery radars to Ukraine and is looking at other assistance it may be able to provide, US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said.

"I will tell you that we have provided a large number of counter battery radars and we are looking at some of these other things," Nuland said on Tuesday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Nuland was asked if the United States was considering deploying surface-to-air defense systems such as Iron Dome or the NASAMS air defense system.

Nuland conveyed that deploying Iron Dome might be difficult since it requires training, the ability to place it, but there other systems under consideration.

The US Congress has been discussing sanctions and other measures against the Russian Federation in response to their ongoing military operation in Ukraine, in addition to humanitarian and economic aid packages.

Congress is expected to approve \$12 billion in additional aid for Ukraine by the end of the week.

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Dual US-Russian National Charged With Illegally Acting as Russian Agent - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - A New York federal court unsealed charges against a dual US-Russian national for allegedly acting as an illegal foreign agent of Russia without registering with the US government, the Justice Department said.

"A federal court in New York unsealed a complaint today charging a dual Russian and US citizen with acting and conspiring to act in the United States illegally as an agent of the Russian government, willfully failing to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), as well as conspiring to commit visa fraud and making false statements to the FBI," the Justice Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

Elena Branson, 61, is facing charges, including acting as a foreign government agent without notification, conspiring to commit visa fraud and making false statements to the FBI, the release said.

Branson left the United States for Russia in 2020 and remains at large, the release added.

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Russia, China Developed Capability to Counter US Space Military Systems - Commander

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - China and Russia have developed a wide array of systems and capabilities to destroy, disrupt and challenge American space-based systems, US Space Command head Gen. James Dickenson said in a congressional testimony.

"[T]he PRC [People's Republic of China] and Russia have tested counter-space weapons across multiple domains as a way to blunt US influence, deter and counter a possible US response during conflict or crisis, and across the board reduce US and allied military effectiveness in the future," Dickinson told the US Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday.

Russia considers the US dependency on space as an exploitable vulnerability and has therefore developed capabilities including electronic warfare and directed energy weapons that can deny, degrade, and disrupt communications, navigation, and space-based intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, Dickinson said.

"These counter-space capabilities enable Russia to deny, damage, and defeat US space-based systems in order to reduce US military effectiveness and control conflict escalation if deterrence fails," Dickinson said.

In the next five to ten years, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s Strategic Support Force will field a range of counter-space weapons to directly challenge US space superiority and threaten the United States in all orbital regimes, he added.

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Nuland Says Nord Stream 2 Dead, Avoids Question if Pipeline Sanctions Should Be Permanent

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday that the Nord Stream 2 project is "dead," but avoided answering whether US sanctions imposed on the pipeline should be permanent.

"I think Nord Stream 2 is now dead. It is a hunk of metal at the bottom of the sea. I don't think it will ever be revived," Nuland told a US Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Tuesday.

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Russia, China Can Challenge, Destroy US Key Space Military Systems - Space Command Chief

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Space is no longer a sanctuary for the armed forces and weapons systems of the United States given that Russia and China have both developed a wide array of systems and capabilities to destroy, disrupt and challenge them, US Space Command head Gen. James Dickenson said in a congressional testimony.

"[T]he PRC [People's Republic of China] and Russia have tested counter-space weapons across multiple domains as a way to blunt US influence, deter and counter a possible US response during conflict or crisis, and across the board reduce US and allied military effectiveness in the future," Dickinson told the US Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday.

Russia considers the US dependency on space as an exploitable vulnerability and has therefore developed capabilities including electronic warfare and directed energy weapons that can deny, degrade, and disrupt communications, navigation, and space-based ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance], Dickinson said.

"These counter-space capabilities enable Russia to deny, damage, and defeat US space-based systems in order to reduce US military effectiveness and control conflict escalation if deterrence fails," Dickinson said.

In the next five to ten years, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s Strategic Support Force will field a range of counter-space weapons to directly challenge US space superiority and threaten the United States in all orbital regimes, Dickinson added.

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US, Allies Telling China Neutrality 'Not an Option' in Russia-Ukraine Conflict - Nuland

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States and its allies are trying to convince Beijing that neutrality is not an option with respect to the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said in a congressional hearing. "The Chinese like to say that they are neutral in this conflict... [German] Chancellor [Olaf] Scholz and [French] President [Emmanuel] Macron talked to [Chinese President] Xi Jinping just today to impress upon the Chinese that neutrality is not an option here," Nuland said on Tuesday.

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US Does Not Know How Far China Will Expand Nuclear Arsenal, Goals - STRATCOM Chief

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US military chiefs do not know how far China will go in its current rapid expansion of long-range strategic nuclear missiles, Strategic Command (STRATCOM) chief Adm. Charles Richard said in a congressional testimony.

"We don't know how far China is going to go. I don't know that we have an idea what the end point of China's nuclear expansion is," Richard told the US Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday.

US military chiefs have not come to any consensus on how China might use its rapidly growing nuclear capabilities for coercive purposes or to otherwise support its interests around the world, Richard said.

"I don't think we've thought about in a long time what the coercive use of these capabilities are," Richard said.

China's rapidly growing space program was second only to the United States in the number of operational satellites it maintains with 55 launches last year, surpassing the 51 US launches, Richard added.

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US Nuclear Triad Modernization 'On Track' But New Warheads Delayed - STRATCOM Chief

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Plans to modernize the air, land and sea-based systems of the US nuclear deterrent system or "triad" are on schedule, but major delays have hit plans to create the pits needed to make nuclear warheads, Strategic Command (STRATCOM) chief Admiral Charles Richard told Congress.

"The overall capitalization of the Triad is on track," Richard told the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) in testimony on Tuesday.

However, he added, long delays in the production pits may last until 2030 and beyond.

The US strategic forces had reached the point where they could no longer deter other nations with only the aging remains of the Cold War weapons systems, all far more than 30 years old, and modernization plans were starting at least a decade later than they should have, Richard stated.

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Chinese Companies Aiding Russia Could Be Shut Down - US Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Chinese companies that defy sanctions on Russia and Belarus can be subjected to "devastating" actions, US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo said in an interview.

"We could essentially shut SMIC down because we [the United States] prevent them from using our equipment and our software," Raimondo told The New York Times in an interview published on Tuesday about Chinese firms that continue working with Russian counterparts.

Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation or any Chinese companies breaching US export control measures imposed on Russia and Belarus can be shut down should they deliver chips and other high-tech items to the sanctioned countries, she added.

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Russian Embassy Says US Oil Imports Ban to Cause Volatility in Global Energy Markets
(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-10)

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States' move to ban Russian oil will result in volatility in global energy markets and will have a negative impact on US companies and citizens, the Russian Embassy in the United States said in a statement.

"It is obvious that the rejection of our resources will lead to significant fluctuations in the world energy markets as well," the statement said on Tuesday. "It will negatively affect the interests of companies and consumers, primarily in the United States itself."

Earlier on Tuesday, US President Joe Biden announced the United States would ban Russian oil imports.

The embassy noted in the statement that Russia can redirect its high-quality and competitive products to other places.

"It is time for the American side to realize the illusory nature of attempts to dictate their will and force us to abandon the protection of national interests with the help of the sanctions club," the embassy said.

The embassy also said the United States sanctions against Russia have long crossed all boundaries of political and economic sense and the past several weeks have shown this quite clearly.

"Washington's decision today to ban purchases of oil, oil products, gas and coal from Russia is in the same category. The goal is to demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice one's own interests in order to 'hit harder' our country. The fact that restrictions are always a double-edged weapon, as usual, is not thought about in the United States. Ordinary Americans are facing rising prices for gasoline, electricity and heating, and will suffer even more with the imposition of new sanctions," the statement said.

US gasoline prices reached an all-time high record of \$4.17 per gallon on Tuesday, the American Automobile Association (AAA) said. This is the highest recorded national average price, the AAA added. On Monday, the average price for regular gas was \$4.065 per gallon, while a week ago it was \$3.619, the AAA added.

The United States and its allies have imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia in response to its special military operation in Ukraine. The sanctions have slowed but not entirely eliminated the ability of Russian exporters of oil and gas to transact deals that require world financial networks and especially dollars.

Russia provides 10% of the world's crude oil needs and 40% of Europe's gas requirements. The United States, however, buys a limited amount of Russian oil, taking just 20% of the 10.5 million barrels per day exported by Russia in 2021.

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US Oil Output Seen Near Record High in 2023, Averaging 13Mln Barrels Daily - EIA

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US oil output is expected to return to a near record high averaging 13 million barrels daily by next year, the Energy Information Administration forecast as oil drillers in the country suggested they may produce more after crude prices hit 14-year highs above \$130 a barrel.

"We forecast that production will rise to average 12.0 million b/d in 2022 and then to record high production on an annual-average basis of 13.0 million b/d in 2023," the EIA said in its monthly report on the US Short-Term Energy Outlook on Tuesday.

US oil production hit all-time highs of 13.1 million barrels daily in March 2020, just before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. The demand destruction in energy that followed sent the benchmark price of US crude to a historic minus \$40 per barrel in April 2020 and production to below 11.6 million barrels daily by December that year.

Since those lows, oil prices have jumped dramatically though production has barely picked up, standing at just around 11.6 million barrels last week, according to weekly EIA data.

US West Texas Intermediate crude currently trades at around \$125 a barrel, after hitting above \$130 this week on fears of a global supply crisis sparked by sanctions on Russia from US and European government's protesting Moscow's war against Ukraine. The retail price of automobile fuel gasoline at US pumps, meanwhile, starts at 14-year highs of around \$4 a gallon.

The EIA production outlook came as Scott Sheffield, chief executive of Pioneer Natural Resources, the biggest US shale oil driller, told London-based Financial Times in an interview published Tuesday that America needs to add up to 2.5 million barrels daily in production to bring output meaningfully higher and gasoline prices lower.

But Sheffield said this cannot be done overnight. The process will take months, requiring the blessings of each drilling company's shareholders — who were just earning the dividends they deserved, after losing money for years on shale oil, he said.

"We'd have to go to our shareholder base and ask what their thoughts are," Sheffield added.

Separately, the shale industry and rival Republican politicians in Congress supported President Joe Biden on Tuesday in his announcement of a unilateral US ban on Russian oil that would add to existing sanctions against Moscow.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) -

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

* The United States and Russia continue to maintain the deconfliction channel on Ukraine and have completed about 12 calls, a senior US Defense Department official said on Tuesday.

* Russia has evacuated 223 foreign nationals from dangerous areas of the Ukrainian region of Kherson while Ukraine remains reluctant to participate in the evacuation process, the chief for Russian National Center for State Defense Control, Lieutenant-General Mikhail Mizintsev, said.

* There is a humanitarian corridor from the city of Sumy, convoys are currently being formed for further evacuation of people, the head of the Sumy regional administration, Dmytro Zhyvitsky, said.

* Another humanitarian corridor has been launched from Mariupol to Zaporizhzhia, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said.

* Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that there is a possibility of discussing the recognition of Crimea as Russia's part and the independence of the Donbas republics and finding a compromise on how people will further live in these territories.

US BAN ON RUSSIAN OIL IMPORTS

* US President Joe Biden announced a US ban on Russian oil imports at a presser on Tuesday.

* Biden said that Washington's decision to ban imports related to Russian oil is not without cost for the United States.

* The US Congress will pass legislation further sanctioning Russia for its ongoing military operation in Ukraine, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said.

- * Biden will sign an Executive Order placing an array of restrictions on the Russian energy sector in response to Russia's ongoing military operation in Ukraine, the White House said,
- * The oil companies have 45 days to deliver on the existing contracts amid the US oil imports ban, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said.
- * Washington's move to bar Russian oil will result in volatility in global energy markets and will have a negative impact on US companies and citizens, the Russian Embassy in the United States said in a statement.

ENERGY MARKETS

- * The European Commission proposes to develop a special plan for the European Union, which could reduce the demand for Russian gas by two thirds as early as this year, the commission said on Tuesday.
- * Russia provided approximately 45% of the EU's gas imports in 2021, 27% of crude oil and 46% of coal, the European Commission said.
- * US gasoline prices reached an all-time high record of \$4.17 per gallon, the American Automobile Association (AAA) said.
- * The current events in Ukraine will result in the biggest ever global oil supply disruption because Russia is an irreplaceable supplier, S&P Global Executive Director Aaron Brady said at the CERAWEEK conference in Houston, Texas.

ISRAEL-RUSSIA TALKS

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin held a phone conversation with Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and discussed with him Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the Kremlin press service said on Tuesday.

GERMAN-FRANCE-CHINA TALKS

- * German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, French President Emmanuel Macron and Chinese President Xi Jinping expressed their unanimous opinion during a video conference on Tuesday on the need to support all diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict in Ukraine, German government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit said.
- * The current situation in Ukraine is worrying and China deeply regrets the hostilities on the European continent, Chinese President Xi said during a virtual meeting with Macron and Scholz

RUSSIA-TURKEY DEFENSE NEGOTIATIONS

- * Ankara expects Moscow's support in ensuring safe arrival of merchant ships waiting in Russian ports back to Turkey, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said in a phone conversation with his Russian counterpart Sergei Shoigu on Tuesday.
- * Shoigu and Akar discussed the situation in Ukraine, as well as other topical issues of cooperation between the two countries' defense ministries, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

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Nuland Says US Ambassadors Instructed to Compel Other Nations to Apply Russia Sanctions

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has instructed its ambassadors to try and influence their host nations to implement sanctions against Russia alongside Washington's allies in response to Moscow's ongoing military operation in Ukraine, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said on Tuesday.

"Not only are we pressing every country that we speak to at the President and Secretary's level and all the levels in the department, every single one of our ambassadors has instructions to work with their host nations to try to get them to match US and EU and allied sanctions to the extent that they can and are willing to condemn Russia," Nuland said during a Senate hearing on Ukraine.

The United States is also trying to influence a number of big countries that have so far abstained from implementing sanctions and other measures to "get on the right side of history," Nuland added.

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Nuland Says Ukraine Has Biological Research Facilities, Concerned About Russian Takeover

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Ukraine hosts biological research facilities and the United States is concerned that they could come under the control of the Russian forces, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said on Tuesday.

"Ukraine has biological research facilities, which in fact we are now quite concerned Russian forces may be seeking to gain control of, so we are working with the Ukrainians on how they can prevent any of those research materials from falling into the hands of Russian forces should they approach," Nuland said during a Senate hearing on Ukraine.

On February 24, documentation was received from Ukrainian biological research laboratories showing the destruction of dangerous pathogens including anthrax, cholera and the plague in what could be a cover up of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) violations, Russian Foreign Minister spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

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White House Says US Paying Higher Gas Prices Due to Putin's Actions - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is of the opinion that Americans are paying higher gas prices because of the actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin in Ukraine, US spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"Americans are paying a higher price at the pump, because of the actions of President Putin," Psaki said. "This is a Putin spike at a gas at the gas pump, not one prompted by our sanctions."

US gasoline prices reached an all-time high record of \$4.17 per gallon, the American Automobile Association (AAA) said on Tuesday.

This is the highest recorded national average price, the AAA also said. On Monday, the average price for regular gas was \$4.065 per gallon, while a week ago it was \$3.619, the AAA added. The United States and its allies have imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia in response to its special military operation in Ukraine. The sanctions have significantly slowed but not entirely eliminated the ability of Russian exporters of oil and gas to transact deals that require world financial networks and especially dollars.

The United States also announced on Tuesday that it was unilaterally banning imports of Russian oil, with President Joe Biden acknowledging that Europe may not be ready yet to join America in this direction due to the bloc's heavy reliance on Russian gas supplies.

Russia provides 10% of the world's crude oil needs and 40% of Europe's gas requirements. The United States, however, buys a limited amount of Russian oil, taking just 20% of the 10.5 million barrels per day exported by Russia in 2021.

The sanctions against Russia have led to a dramatic rise in global oil prices this year, with Brent rising more than 60% to reprise 2008 highs of above \$130 a barrel. At Tuesday's lunch hour in New York, Brent traded at \$125 a barrel, off the day's high of \$133.

The EIA said it expects Brent to average \$89 a barrel by 2023, but acknowledged that his price forecast is highly uncertain.

The EIA also forecast that US crude's West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, benchmark will average \$101.17 for all of 2022. WTI was trading at \$123 a barrel by the New York lunch hour on Tuesday.

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Nuland Says US Working on Cryptocurrency Sanctions Loophole to Target Russia
WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland said on Tuesday that Washington is working on eliminating cryptocurrency sanctions loophole in order to target Russia.

"We are," Nuland said during a hearing at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee when asked whether the Biden administration is dealing with opportunity of Russia to use cryptocurrency.

"We are consulting with our European allies and partners on how we might do more together."

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US, Russia Share Desire to Prevent Iran From Acquiring Nuclear Weapon - White House

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia share the desire to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"[E]ven as we have significant, serious concerns about the horrific and barbaric invasion that President [Vladimir] Putin is leading [in Ukraine], we believe we [Russia, US] do share a desire to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon," Psaki said during a press briefing.

On Tuesday, Psaki said the United States and Russia continue to make progress with Iran on negotiations to return to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) despite tensions between the two countries over Ukraine.

The Russian and Iranian foreign ministers spoke by phone on Monday about the conflict in Ukraine and efforts to rescue the nuclear deal, the Russian ministry said.

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US Congress May Pass Spending Bill With Ukraine Aid by End of Week - Senate Leaders

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US Congress could pass an omnibus government funding bill that includes more than \$12 billion in aid for Ukraine as early as the end of the week, Senate leaders said on Tuesday.

"Before the end of the week, we are aiming to pass a government funding omnibus bill," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Tuesday during a news conference.

Text for the legislation could come out as early as Tuesday, Schumer added.

The omnibus spending legislation would include both government funding and an aid package for Ukraine.

Schumer placed the aid package at more than \$12 billion, while Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said the parties agreed to \$14 billion.

"Where we've ended up is at \$14 billion... The package I gather will be coming over from the House attached to the [omnibus spending bill]. I think it's an important step, and it needs to be passed, and it needs to be passed quickly," McConnell said during a news conference.

The US Congress has been discussing sanctions and other measures against the Russian Federation in response to their ongoing military operation in Ukraine, in addition to humanitarian and economic aid packages.

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OPEC Official Says Global Oil Market Situation Remains 'Uncertain'

HOUSTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The global oil market remains uncertain in light of the conflict in Ukraine and there is no prediction on how long it will stay volatile, OPEC Research Division Director Ayed Al-Qahtani told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"No. It is called 'uncertainty,' that's why it is uncertain," Al-Qahtani said when asked how long he expects the global market to remain volatile.

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Too Early to Assess How US Ban on Russian Oil Imports Affects Energy Markets - OPEC

HOUSTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - It is too early to assess the impact the US ban on Russian oil imports will have on the global energy market, OPEC Research Division Director Ayed Al-Qahtani told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"I think that we have to look at the numbers, and if those barrels are actually removed from the market, then we will take them into our books and see what this means for the market," Al-Qahtani said. "As for now, it is only an announcement and anything that anyone could tell you about this is a pure speculation."

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Russian Embassy Says US Oil Import Ban to Cause Volatility in Global Energy Markets

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Washington's move to bar Russian oil will result in volatility in global energy markets and will have a negative impact on US companies and citizens, the Russian Embassy in the United States said in a statement on Tuesday.

"It is obvious that the rejection of our resources will lead to significant fluctuations in the world energy markets as well," the statement said. "It will negatively affect the interests of companies and consumers, primarily in the United States itself."

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US Did Not Expect Nor Request European States to Follow Suit on Oil Import Ban - WH

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States neither expected nor requested European countries to follow suit on the oil imports ban, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"We do not expect nor did we request for the European countries to follow suit," Psaki told reporters. "Every country will make their own decisions."

US President Joe Biden announced earlier on Tuesday a US ban on Russian oil imports. The United Kingdom will phase out the import of Russian oil by the end of 2022 in response to the military operation in Ukraine, Energy Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said Tuesday.

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US Believes Impact of Russian Oil Import Ban Not to Be Long Term – White House

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that the impact of the ban on Russian oil imports will not be long term and the Biden administration will mitigate negative consequences of it, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"We believe that the impact of this oil ban [on Russia] we announced today will be not long term, and what we're working to do is to take steps to mitigate it, which is in part the release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, continuing to coordinate and communicate with global energy suppliers and continuing to consider a range of options," Psaki said during a press briefing.

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Global Oil Prices Will Increase to Reflect Risk of Disruption - US Automobile Association

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The American Automobile Association (AAA) expects the global oil markets will continue to respond to the current situation by increasing energy prices, AAA spokesperson Ellen Edmonds told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"As the conflict continues between Russia and the Ukraine, the oil markets will likely respond by increasing the price of crude oil to reflect more risk of disruption to tight global oil supplies this week. If crude continues to increase, prices at the pump will respond accordingly and continue to climb," Edmonds said.

Earlier on Tuesday, the AAA said that US gasoline prices reached an all-time high record of \$4.17 per gallon.

"Gas prices typically decline after the summer due to lower demand and winter blend gasoline. However, if oil prices remain elevated, pump prices will likely follow suit," Edmonds said.

Asked about possible price increase due to the new US ban on Russian oil, Edmonds said the prices will likely continue to increase as more sanctions are imposed against Russia.

"A potential ban of crude imports from Russia to the United States or other countries will likely cause prices to continue to rise," Edmonds added.

US President Joe Biden announced earlier on Tuesday a US ban on Russian oil imports.

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White House Says Oil Companies Have 45 Days to Deliver on Existing Contracts Before Ban

WASHINGTON , March 8 (Sputnik) - The oil companies have 45 days to deliver on the existing contracts amid the US oil imports ban, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Tuesday. "It will be on new contracts, and then for contracts that are existing they will 45 days to deliver on those ," Psaki said.

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Brent Oil to Average \$117/Bbl in March, Up 30% From February - Energy Agency

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Global oil prices, as indicated by the London-traded benchmark Brent, are expected to average \$117 per barrel by end-March or 30% more than the forecast for last month, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said on Tuesday as Western sanctions on Russia boosted prices.

"We expect the Brent price will average \$117/b in March... and \$102/b in the second half of 2022," the EIA said. It had previously forecast \$90 per barrel for February.

The United States and its allies have imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia in response to its special military operation in Ukraine. The sanctions have slowed but not entirely eliminated the ability of Russian exporters of oil and gas to transact deals that require world financial networks and especially dollars.

The United States also announced on Tuesday that it was unilaterally banning imports of Russian oil, with President Joe Biden acknowledging that Europe may not be ready yet to join America in this direction due to the bloc's heavy reliance on Russian gas supplies.

Russia provides 10% of the world's crude oil needs and 40% of Europe's gas requirements. The United States, however, buys a limited amount of Russian oil, taking just 20% of the 10.5 million barrels per day exported by Russia in 2021.

The sanctions against Russia have led to a dramatic rise in global oil prices this year, with Brent rising more than 60% to reprise 2008 highs of above \$130 a barrel. At Tuesday's lunch hour in New York, Brent traded at \$125 a barrel, off the day's high of \$133.

The EIA said it expects Brent to average \$89 a barrel by 2023, but acknowledged that his price forecast is highly uncertain.

"Actual price outcomes will be dependent on the degree to which existing sanctions imposed on Russia, any potential future sanctions, and independent corporate actions affect Russia's oil production or the sale of Russia's oil in the global market," the EIA said. "In addition, the degree to which other oil producers respond to current oil prices, as well as the effects macroeconomic developments might have on global oil demand, will be important for oil price formation."

The EIA also forecast that US crude's West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, benchmark will average \$101.17 for all of 2022. WTI was trading at \$123 a barrel by the New York lunch hour on Tuesday.

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Apple Unveils New 5G iPhone SE, Other Products Launching This Month

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - Tech giant Apple is launching new 5G iPhone and iPad Air models that will be available later this month alongside other novel products, the company announced on Tuesday.

"Apple today announced iPhone SE, a powerful new iPhone in an iconic design, with exceptional capabilities and performance at an incredible price," the company said in a press release on the product launch.

Pre-order for the iPhone SE will begin on March 11, with availability beginning on March 18, the press release said.

Apple is also launching a new iPad Air with 5G capability, the original M1 chip and new Ultra Wide front camera for a "more natural" video conferencing experience, the company also said in a press release.

The new iPad Air model will have the same pre-order and availability dates as the iPhone SE. Earlier, Apple held a virtual media event to kick off these products among others.

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Proud Boys Leader Indicted on January 6 Capitol Breach Charges - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The leader of the right-wing group Proud Boys was indicted and arrested on conspiracy and other charges connected to the January 6 breach of the US Capitol, the US Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"Henry 'Enrique' Tarrio, the former national chairman of the Proud Boys, was arrested today following his indictment on conspiracy and other charges related to the breach of the US Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, which disrupted a joint session of the US Congress that was in the process of ascertaining and counting the electoral votes related to the presidential election," the Justice Department said in a press release.

Tarrio was arrested in Miami, Florida, and is set to make his initial court appearance on Tuesday in the Southern District of Florida court, the release said.

The indictment against Tarrio alleges that he and other co-defendants who were also connected to the Proud Boys conspired to obstruct an official proceeding - the certification of the Electoral College vote, the release said.

The defendants on January 6 allegedly led a crowd into the US Capitol, leading to destruction of property and assaults on law enforcement, the release added.

On January 4, 2021, Tarrio was also arrested in Washington for stealing and burning a Black Lives Matter flag from a local church the previous month and for possessing illegal firearms magazines. A court ordered Tarrio to stay out of Washington as part

Tarrio was indicted on one count of conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, obstruction of an official proceeding, and two counts each of assaulting, resisting or impeding certain officers and destruction of government property, the release also said.

More than 775 individuals from almost all 50 US states have been arrested for crimes related to the January 6 Capitol breach in the 14 months since the incident, according to the Justice Department.

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OPEC Believes Oil Price Now 'Unhealthy' for Everyone, Expects Quick Crisis Resolution

HOUSTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) believes that the current prices for oil are "unhealthy" for everyone in the world and hopes the crisis will be resolved at the same pace that it was formed, OPEC Research Division Director Ayed Shaya Al-Qahtani said on Tuesday.

"We hope that the current crisis will be resolved with the same pace [it formed]. The current oil price is unhealthy for everyone," Al-Qahtani said during the Cambridge Energy Research Associates (CERA) Week conference.

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OPEC Believes Oil Price Now is 'unhealthy' for everyone, Expects Current Crisis will be Quickly resolved

Sputnik

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Possibly Biggest Oil Supply Disruption Ahead as Russia Irreplaceable Supplier - S&P Global

WASHINGTON , March 8 (Sputnik) - The current events in Ukraine will result in the biggest ever global oil supply disruption because Russia is an irreplaceable supplier, S&P Global Executive Director Aaron Brady said at the CERAWEEK conference in Houston, Texas, on Tuesday.

"Of course, there is a lot of uncertainty but I think it's pretty clear that a supply disruption is coming," Brady said. "We just don't know how big it actually will be. But potentially, considering the size of Russia, it could be the biggest physical oil supply in history, you know, comparable to the 1977. Russia is irreplaceable."

US President Joe Biden signed an Executive Order imposing sanctions on the Russian energy sector in response to Russia's military operation in Ukraine.

The order bans importing Russian crude oil and certain petroleum products, liquefied natural gas, and coal, into the United States. The order also bans new US investment in Russia's energy sector and financing or enabling foreign companies that are making investment to produce energy in Russia.

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US, Russia Maintain Communication Via Deconfliction Line on Ukraine - Pentagon Official

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) – The United States and Russia continue to maintain the deconfliction channel on Ukraine and have completed about 12 calls, a senior US Defense Department official said on Tuesday.

"We have maintained communication with the Russians on that deconfliction channel [on Ukraine]. There is routine check-ins, basically, just to make sure that it's working. I think there's been about a dozen calls with the Russians, really, again, administrative in nature," the official said during a press briefing.

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US Defense Chief Talked to UK, Slovakian, French Counterparts About Ukraine - Pentagon
WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin this morning talked to his Slovakian, UK, and French counterparts about the situation in Ukraine, a defense official said on Tuesday.

"[Austin spoke this] morning with the defense minister from Slovakia as well as the United Kingdom, Ben Wallace. And he's on the phone right now with the defense minister of France," the defense official told reporters. "These calls were obviously all centered around the war in Ukraine."

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US Has No Direct Evidence of War Crimes in Ukraine - Defense Intelligence Chief

WASHINGTON , March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has no direct evidence of war crimes in Ukraine besides what is seen on social media, Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier said on Tuesday.

"I don't know if we have direct evidence besides what we see on social media," Berrier said during a congressional hearing.

German Public Prosecutor General Peter Frank has launched an investigation into alleged war crimes in Ukraine, Der Spiegel reported on Tuesday, citing judiciary sources.

Last month, International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor Karim Khan announced his decision to open an investigation into possible war crimes in Ukraine. Later, Khan said that an advance team of ICC experts had departed for the country.

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US Almost Completed Deliveries of \$350Mln in Military Aid to Ukraine - Pentagon Official

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has almost completed deliveries of the latest \$350 million batch of military aid to Ukraine at "unbelievable level of speed" amid the conflict with Russia, a senior US Defense Department official said on Tuesday.

"The \$350 million, which the President have approved, a little bit more than a week or so ago, is nearly completely delivered, which is an unbelievable level of speed," the official said during a press briefing.

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US Not Seeing Russia Pulling Troops to Boost Combat Power in Ukraine - Defense Official

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is not seeing Russia pulling troops from elsewhere in the country to boost its combat power in Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict there, a senior US defense official said on Tuesday.

"We are not seeing indications that he [Russian President Vladimir Putin] is pulling from elsewhere in the country to add to that combat power [already in Ukraine]. [Russian] combat power is largely intact, quite frankly," the official said during a press briefing.

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US Issues Array of New Sanctions Targeting Russian Energy Sector - White House

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will sign an Executive Order placing an array of restrictions on the Russian energy sector in response to Russia's ongoing military operation in Ukraine, the White House said on Tuesday.

"Today's Executive Order bans: The importation into the United States of Russian crude oil and certain petroleum products, liquefied natural gas, and coal," the White House said in a fact sheet on the Executive Order.

The order also bans new US investment in Russia's energy sector and financing or enabling foreign companies that are making investment to produce energy in Russia.

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Pelosi Says US Congress to Pass Legislation Supporting Further Russia Sanctions - Letter

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The US Congress will pass legislation further sanctioning Russia for its ongoing military operation in Ukraine, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Tuesday following a speech on the matter by President Joe Biden.

"The Congress commends the President for announcing action to stop the import of Russian energy products into the United States – which we will support by passing strong, bipartisan legislation to that effect today," Pelosi said in a letter to her Democratic colleagues.

The legislation would ban the import of Russian oil and energy products into the United States, review Russia's access to the World Trade Organization and other ways to diminish Russia in the world economy, and reauthorize and strengthen the Magnitsky Act to extend Russian sanctions, Pelosi said.

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Biden Proposes \$2.6Bln in 2023 Budget to Promote Gender Equity, Equality Worldwide

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that his administration is requesting \$2.6 billion in the fiscal year (FY) 2023 budget for foreign assistance programs that promote gender equity and equality globally, an amount that is more than double than that requested last year, the White House said on Tuesday.

"We created a Gender Equity and Equality Action Fund to promote the economic security of women around the world," Biden in a statement provided by the White House. "And it's why I'm proud that my FY 2023 budget will request \$2.6 billion for foreign assistance programs that promote gender equality worldwide, more than doubling the amount requested for gender programs last year."

The White House issued the statement on International Women's Day, which celebrates women's equality with men.

Biden said his administration has joined others in the world who are celebrating International Women's Day to recognize the achievements of women and girls in the United States and globally.

However, Biden said despite the significant progress there is more work to be done "to deliver the full measure of equity, dignity, and opportunity due to all women and girls."

Biden also said he is particularly proud that gender equity has been a cornerstone of his administration as evidenced by investments in childcare and support of advancing women's economic opportunities; reauthorizing and strengthening the Violence Against Women Act; implementing sweeping military justice reform to fight against pervasive sexual assaults in the military; as well as promoting other projects, proposals and laws to improve the status, safety and opportunities for women.

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Biden Says Decision to Ban Imports of Russian Oil 'Not Without Cost' for US

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that Washington's decision to ban imports related to Russian oil is not without cost for the United States.

"The decision today is not without cost here at home," Biden said at the White House.

Biden said the decision was made in close consultation with allies including in Europe, many of which the US understands may not be in a position to join the United States on this ban. He also said the US produces far more oil domestically than all European countries combined.

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Biden Urges Congress to Pass \$12Bln Ukraine Assistance Package

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Tuesday called on Congress to approve legislation to provide Ukraine with \$12 billion in assistance.

"I call on Congress to pass a \$12 billion Ukraine assistance package that I have asked them,"

Biden said during remarks at the White House.

Biden previously called on Congress to approve \$10 billion in assistance for Ukraine.

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UN Does Not Prohibit Staff to Say 'War,' 'Invasion' About Situation in Ukraine - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, March 8 (Sputnik) - Spokesperson for the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN) Stephane Dujarric rejected reports claiming the world body had prohibited its staff to use the words "war" or "invasion" when speaking about the conflict in Ukraine.

"There is a misconception that UN staff have been ordered to avoid using certain words to describe the situation in Ukraine. Staff were not instructed not to use words like 'war' and 'invasion' to describe the situation," Dujarric told Sputnik.

Earlier on Tuesday, the newspaper Irish Times reported that the United Nations had banned its staff from referring to the situation in Ukraine as "war" or "invasion" and instructed them instead to use the terms "conflict" or "military offensive."

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Biden Announces US Ban on Russian Oil Imports

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden announced a US ban on Russian oil imports at a presser on Tuesday.

"We're [United States] banning all imports of Russian oil and gas and energy. That means Russian oil will no longer be acceptable at US ports and American people will do another powerful blow to Putin is war machine," Biden said.

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US, Ukraine Doing 'Intensive' Intelligence Sharing - CIA Chief

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has done intensive intelligence sharing with Ukraine and continues to do so, CIA Director William Burns said during a congressional hearing on Tuesday.

"We've done intensive intelligence sharing, and we continue to, with the Ukrainians," Burns said. Burns said in January he met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kiev.

"We shared with him intelligence we had at the time about some of the most graphic, concerning details of Russia's planning about Kiev as well and we've continued to do so every day since then," he added.

On February 24, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and "denazify" Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics in countering the aggression of Ukrainian troops.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger. Moscow has repeatedly stressed that it has no plans to occupy Ukraine.

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US Senators Introduce Bill to Sanction Purchase of Russian Gold

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - US Senators John Cornyn, Bill Flagerty, Maggie Hassan and Angus King have introduced a bill to impose sanctions against transactions with gold assets from Russia, Senator Cornyn's office said in a news release on Tuesday.

"[The Senators] introduced the Stop Russian Government and Oligarchs from Limiting Democracy (Stop Russian GOLD) Act, which would apply secondary sanctions to anyone transacting with or transporting gold from Russia's central bank holdings or selling gold physically or electronically in Russia," the release said.

The senators said in the release that the current sanctions regime against Russia has loopholes and allows the Russian government and oligarchs to transfer money to gold.

"The secondary sanctions in this legislation would deter the purchase of Russian gold and close this loophole that allows the Russian Federation to soften the financial impact of sanctions," the release said.

On February 24, Russia undertook a special military operation in Ukraine in response to calls from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend themselves from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger. The United States and its allies have responded by imposing comprehensive sanctions against Russia.

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US Believes Putin Determined to Dominate and Control Ukraine - CIA

WASHINGTON , March 8 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that Russian President Vladimir Putin is set to dominate and control Ukraine, CIA Director William Burns said during a congressional hearing on Tuesday.

"I think Putin is determined to dominate and control Ukraine, to shape its orientation ," Burns said.

On February 24, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and "denazify" Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics in countering the aggression of Ukrainian troops.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger. Moscow has repeatedly stressed that it has no plans to occupy Ukraine.

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US Trade Deficit Hits Record High of \$89.7Bln, Rising 9.4% in January - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 8 (Sputnik) - The US trade deficit rose 9.4 percent month-on-month to reach a record high of \$89.7 billion in January, the Commerce Department said Tuesday as businesses raised imports to feed demand for goods in an economy struggling with pandemic-related supply-chain disruptions and soaring prices.

"The goods and services deficit was \$89.7 billion in January, up \$7.7 billion from \$82.0 billion in December, revised," the Bureau of Economic Analysis, a unit within the Commerce Department, said in a news release.

Historical data from the department showed that to be a new high for the US trade deficit since December's peak of \$81.9 billion.

The data also showed that the United States bought more foreign oil, natural gas, and automobiles and other goods to feed demand in an economy still hampered by delivery and other logistical problems two years into the COVID-19 pandemic.

High prices of imports due to soaring inflation also boosted the trade deficit. Oil prices alone, as per global crude benchmark Brent, rose 17% in January. They have continued rising since, climbing 11% in February and 28% so far for March due to the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Exports of US-manufactured goods fell 1.7% to \$224.4 billion in January, the smallest amount in four months. Data showed the decline mostly to be in shipments of US pharmaceutical products.

The United States has typically run large trade deficits for years, with the trend heightened since 2020 by the COVID-19 outbreak. The US economy is still outpacing the rest of the world in recovery from the pandemic and the Russian-Ukraine conflict could widen the disparity.